

Table of Contents

More history...	1
-----------------	---

More history...

Form follows function

From its inception, Mute* has regarded message and medium, content and carrier as inherently linked. This approach has forced a constant reinvention of our publishing format (we are now on our fifth!) and, more generally, never taking theory's relationship to practice for granted. As a collaborative entity operating within the network paradigm, Mute has a tacit function as a test site: we feature and review innovative and radical cultural practices, but also participate in them, court infection and reflect their evolution within our own. The discourse on prosumers or, more urgently, that of the 'open publishing' models popularised by platforms like Indymedia and Wikimedia provide one such example, and we have been duly haunted by the spectre of editorial decentralisation.

Bottom up world

One promise of 'many to many' media was that it would upturn the traditional broadcast model of mainstream media and deliver unto the world a multitude of active producers, narrowcasting personalised media to each other and cutting out the middleman. Our function as producers would extend from media and informational goods into the material realms of manufacturing and consumer products, all of which would be subject to 'mass customisation', as futurist Alvin Toffler had it in an early characterisation. But for all their associations with empowerment, participation, and the agency of the small, the prosumer is an infinitely ambiguous figure - certainly no guaranteed counterforce to capitalism-as-usual. (Providing many large corporations free content through opinion portals and the like, their oppositional status is further problematised by the nature of the reputation economy which supposedly motivates them.) Other standardbearers of democratisation, to be found travelling under banners like 'Grow Your Own', 'DiY' and 'independent media', *have* irrevocably altered the media power im/balance, even if their often homogenous social composition troubles any claims for a revolution.

Ceci n'est pas un magazine

It was such issues which prompted Mute to publish 'Ceci n'est pas un magazine', a series of mini-manifestoes and progress reports outlining our own plans for a long-term participative publishing model. Part 1 was published in issue 19 (2001), part 2 ('The Magazine that Mistook its Reader for a Hat') in issue 25 (2002/3), and further associated documents have accompanied the recent overhaul of Metamute, all of which are available here.**

What's documented in these files is one path from traditional top-down publishing (albeit that of small magazine) into the uncharted realms of interactivity. In fits and starts, it portrays Mute's vision of diversification, as we attempt to deal with the promise of new media through the provision of tools, editorial content and peer to peer structures. We now find ourselves a hybrid publication attempting to fuse bottom-up content generation with conventional editorial practices of selection, commissioning and editing.

* The present Mute magazine could not have existed without a predecessor and namesake published through the Slade School of Art from 1989-1992. 'Mute v. 01' was an open contributions publication in a variety of formats, edited by Simon Worthington, Daniel Jackson, Helen Arthur and Stephen Faulkner.

** Ceci n'est pas un magazine, the ongoing project of Mute's decentralisation, was heavily influenced by consultancy from Quim Gil (presently of Interactors.coop) and early work on OpenMute.org by Toni Prug (of Open-organizations.org).

More on Mute's economy and organisation...